

Statement of
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House Government Reform Subcommittee on
National Security, Emerging Threats, and
International Relations

Hearing on Private Security Firms:
Standards, Cooperation, and Coordination
On the Battlefield

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2:00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman, Committee Members

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present a short opening statement on the subject of Private Security Firms and our ongoing operations in Iraq. Your letter to the Secretary requesting our appearance also included six specific questions. I will address the questions in this brief presentation and we will provide a more complete written response for the record by the end of this week.

The Department of State Diplomatic Mission in Iraq was reestablished in July 2004. Diplomatic Security crafted a comprehensive set of security programs to meet the very high level of threat in this theater of operation. The programs are a combination of physical and technical security upgrades at our facilities, procedural security regulations, and close personal protection operations for off-compound requirements. Staffing for security programs in Iraq includes nearly 50 Diplomatic Security Special Agents, 14 Marine Security Guards, approximately 1,500 third-country national local guards, hundreds of U.S. and Coalition troops protecting the International Zone and Regional Embassy Offices, and nearly 1,500 highly trained contract personal security specialists. The security specialists in this latter category, referred to in the GAO report as Private Security Providers, have been critical to our efforts to create a secure environment for our U.S. mission personnel.

This effort has not been without great cost and personal tragedy. We are all aware of the number of U.S. military personnel who have lost their lives or who have been seriously injured in this effort, and we honor their memory. In connection with programs conducted by U.S. agencies under Chief of Mission operations, we have lost 119 civilians, including direct-hire employees and contractors. Diplomatic Security has lost two Special Agents and 23 contract personal security specialists killed in action in Iraq since July 2004. Six other contract personal security specialists have lost their lives in our service in Afghanistan and the Gaza. These men and women and their families have paid the highest price in support of our efforts. So it is with the utmost respect that I am here today to brief you and answer your questions relating to the companies who provide us with these fine Americans.

The Department of State primarily utilizes private security firms in Iraq for two major functions. The first is static guard services at our facilities. These contract

security operations are similar to local guard contract programs we utilize at our embassies, consulates, and residences around the world.

The second contracted functions that private companies provide are personal security details and security escorts.

When the U.S. Embassy was activated in July 2004, we found a number of CPA contracts for personal security services in place. As the GAO report pointed out, they varied in capabilities, costs, and levels of training. We worked to immediately reduce the number of different contractors and impose uniform standards for operations. Individual contracts were superseded by using our Worldwide Personal Protective Security Contract. This is a competitively bid contract for personal security services with multiple awardees.

These contractors operate in a very dangerous environment, and their actions, equipment, and methods of operations are specified in our contract requirements. Rules of engagement developed by the embassy and approved by the Chief of Mission and Diplomatic Security govern their use of deadly force.

The companies operate under our contract guidelines but since the establishment of Iraqi sovereignty have also complied with Iraqi legal requirements to register their companies with the appropriate ministry.

Diplomatic Security has carefully crafted very high standards these companies must meet in order to compete effectively and win awards. The personnel these companies provide must also meet high standards and be capable of obtaining a security clearance. Fitness, previous experience, integrity, and the ability to meet security criteria add up to a very selective personnel screening process.

High training standards are another important factor demanded by our contract. We prescribe course criteria, vet the training facilities as well as the instructors, and monitor our contractors to ensure that these security specialists are trained to counter the dangers they face in this high-threat environment. Feedback from on-the-ground operations is incorporated into training regimens to provide replacements with the most up-to-date information on tactics and techniques.

Overall, because of the high standards we set, insistence on high-caliber training, and close oversight and management of the contract both on the ground in Iraq and in headquarters, we have achieved a very high degree of capability in a very short period of time, with very few problems.

The services we provide are primarily for the protection of U.S. Government employees and staff. We do not provide security services for private companies, non-governmental organizations, or implementation partners. However, we are willing to share our contract requirements with those organizations supporting our effort through the Overseas Security Advisory Council, or OSAC, domestically and in Iraq.

In closing, I would like to say that our ability to provide protective operations on the scale required in this high-threat environment would not have been possible without using private security providers. The number of personal security specialists we utilize in Iraq alone is more than all the Diplomatic Security agents we have globally. We could not have hired and trained new agents to meet this requirement as rapidly as the contractors met the requirement, even if we had the funding and FTE available. Meeting this relatively short duration requirement using competitively bid contractors along with establishing high standard requirements is the best possible solution for these circumstances.

Thank you.

I would be pleased to respond to any of your questions.